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CLOSE TO HOME

## **Mentoring for the common (and Uncommon) good**

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I met up with Gerry Moore and Matt Fabela at the 60th Scripps College Ceramic Annual in Claremont. At 81, Moore is tall and energetic with friendly blue eyes. He is also talkative. The two of us chatted about a variety of topics and even found that we share the same birthday — June 9. Meanwhile, Matt, 12, waited patiently. With his dark hair, brown eyes and quiet disposition, he appeared to be Moore's opposite. The two of them, however, have something in common — a love of art that brought them together in a mentoring program through Uncommon Good of Claremont.

Uncommon Good is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the poor and to ending the cycle of poverty for low-income, at-risk children and youth. Its programs include the Clinic to College mentoring program and Adopt an Angel, which sponsors idealistic young doctors and lawyers who choose to serve the poor. Uncommon Good was founded in 1999 by Nancy Mintie, a public interest attorney who specialized in suing slumlords on behalf of the people who were adversely affected by their negligence.

"For many years I worked as a lawyer for the poor," said Mintie, during an interview at the group's headquarters in a former convent on the lot of Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Church and School. "I thought that getting them big sums of money would break the cycle of poverty. But it didn't."

Mintie said that when the money was spent, lawsuit recipients didn't have the earning power to continue to beat poverty, so they fell back into it. She tried putting some money away in college funds, but found that the children had little interest in going to college by the time they reached 18.

"They had already given up," she said. "I realized that we needed to intervene in the lives of these children much earlier. The relationship with the mentor is what gives them that window to the outside world."

Moore, of Claremont, is a retired artist who has worked as a cartoonist, illustrator and art director of the magazine TV Radio Live, which was later bought out by TV Guide.

Fabela is an aspiring artist who enjoys drawing pictures of his pets and likes to work with pastels.

"I think Matt has a really well-developed talent for art at his age," Moore said. "I don't know if I drew that well at his age. I hope he pursues it throughout his life because it's something enjoyable to do even if you don't make a career of it."

Moore became involved with Uncommon Good while volunteering for the annual

Alternative Christmas market at Our Lady of the Assumption to offer parishioners an opportunity to purchase alternative gifts to help the needy. He worked a booth near Mintie, who was representing Uncommon Good.

"I said, 'Do you have any young guys who like doing cartooning?' " he recalled. "She said, 'As a matter of fact, I do.' "

Matt lives in Montclair with his mother, Josie Baca, and his 10-year-old sister, Desiree. He is a sixth-grader at Vista Del Valle School in Claremont, where his mom works.

Moore and Matt spend Thursday afternoons together drawing cartoons, looking cartoons up on the Internet or just doing homework.

"Every time I go over there his wife has a cookie waiting for me on the table," Matt said. "Gerry also takes me to these art galleries at Claremont Colleges."

Moore and his wife, Kathy, have four grown children, including their youngest daughter who is 46 and is disabled. She has always been cared for at home. The family enjoys having Matt visit.

"He's a delightful young man and he's bright, very polite," Moore said. "He's just a nice boy. I hope he enjoys my company as much as I enjoy his. The good thing about mentoring is it works both ways."

The Moores have nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Gerry Moore earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts and English literature at Catholic University in Washington, D.C.

Matt's mom heard about Uncommon Good through the Healthy Start program at the Claremont Unified School District. She wanted her son to have a male role model because he's the only boy in the family. She says Moore has been a good influence on him.

"His grades have gone up," Baca said. "His reading habits are so much better and his music is good, too — he plays violin."

Desiree also has a mentor, a Pomona College student.

"I've always wanted my kids to go to college and continue their education," Baca said, adding, "and with this program they're going to go further. I'm just grateful for everything that the program has done to help me out with my kids. It's been an asset for my family. It's actually helped me to show the kids that they can do almost anything that they want."

Mintie says that mentoring is the most successful intervention that can be introduced into the life of an at-risk child to improve chances for future success. She cites hundreds of studies done in the fields of social science and psychology.

"Mentoring consistently came out on top as the most effective tool for reaching at-risk kids and breaking the cycle of poverty," she said.

She also believes that education is the key to lasting success. "The goal is to break the cycle of poverty in their lives and in their family and the only way to do that is through education," Mintie said.

"In a lot of ways we're empowering them to break that cycle," added Sue Keith, director of development at Uncommon Good. Keith says that more mentors are needed for the program, particularly men. Mentors must have a two- or four-year college degree and pass a criminal background check, reference check and extensive interviews.

Students interested in the program must come from very low-income families and should be in the fourth to ninth grades. Interested parents may call family services coordinator Katie Ruiz at 625-2248.

Potential mentors may call the same number and speak with coordinator Shelley Randles.

**Article found on:** <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/clv/la-clv-closetohome02apr02,1,1515698.story?coll=la-tcn-clv-news>